

DATE: September 1, 2010

REPORT TITLE: **UPDATE AND STATUS REPORT ON ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORTATION INITIATIVES INCLUDING PASSENGER ASSISTANT, COMMUNITY BUS AND TAXI SCRIP PILOT PROGRAMS**

FROM: Dan Labrecque, Commissioner of Public Works

RECOMMENDATION

That the Region of Peel implement the Passenger Assistant Program (PAP) and Taxi Scrip Program as permanent programs within the 'family of services' offered by Accessible Transportation in the Region of Peel, with service levels to be determined annually as part of the annual program budget process;

And further, that staff be authorized to solicit the participation of other qualified taxi vendors in Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga to participate in the Taxi Scrip Program;

And further, that the Region of Peel discontinues the Community Bus Program, in its current form, due to lack of ridership and interest and that staff be directed to research retrofit options for the Community Bus vehicle to increase wheelchair capacity and be used to provide other services like chartered transportation for community agencies that support individuals with disabilities.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- In 2009, the Region of Peel's Accessible Transportation section launched three pilot programs as part of the 'family of services' brokerage model designed to meet increasing demand for accessible transportation services for individuals with disabilities.
- Pilots for the Passenger Assistant Program and Taxi Scrip Program have been successful and continue to show strong growth amongst seniors and people with disabilities.
- The Community Bus Demonstration Project has not proven to be a critical service for residents of Peel despite focused efforts to promote it as a valuable transportation option for seniors and people with disabilities.

DISCUSSION

1. Background

In 2004, a "Study of Transportation of Persons with Disabilities" (STPD) was completed as part of the Planning Department's review of the Regional Official Plan. The review resulted in a report (PL-A1-1) and recommendations adopted by Council to move towards a "family of services" or brokerage model as the most cost effective approach for addressing the full range

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of transportation needs of persons with a broad range of disabilities and ill health. The Social Services Department was initially responsible for implementation of this model. In May 2006, Council received a report outlining a recommended conceptual framework and a first stage implementation plan of a "family of services" model.

Following the STPD, an "Accessible Transportation Business and Operational Plan and Federal Gas Tax Allocation" report (HS-A1-1) was presented to council in October 2006. This report requested that approximately \$13.9 million be allocated from Federal Gas Tax funding to support the capital portion of the following "family of services" model service delivery components:

- Establishment of an Accessible Transportation Coordination Office (ATCO)
- On-going Provision of the Red Cross Dialysis Transportation Program
- Development and implementation of a new Passenger Assistant Program (PAP)
- Development and implementation of a Community Bus Demonstration Project
- Development and implementation of a Taxi Scrip Program
- Initiatives to improve access to and use of conventional public transit by persons with all disabilities (Conventional Transit Access Initiatives)
- TransHelp expansion and facility improvement/relocation (*Discussion of progress made in these areas is outside the purview of this report*)

In May 2009, Council received a further report titled "Update and Status Report on the Accessible Transportation Coordination Office (ATCO)". This report provided an overview of the development and activities of the ATCO since its inception in 2006. The report also highlighted the initiation of the Passenger Assistant Program and the imminent start of a Community Bus and Taxi Scrip Program.

a) Status and Update on ATCO

Since the May 2009 report, ATCO and TransHelp have merged to create the Accessible Transportation section within the Transportation Division of the Public Works Department. The move has allowed staffing resources within the group to be streamlined and service delivery efforts to be jointly coordinated. As a result, several efficiencies have been adopted. For clients in need of accessible transportation options it has created a 'one-stop shop' service delivery model for services and programs.

The newly formed group is not only responsible for the delivery of the Region's TransHelp service but also offers support and resources to people with disabilities and their families living in Peel. The expanded role of Accessible Transportation is:

- To act as a gateway to direct users to appropriate services and screen applicants
- To provide support to transit to optimize access to and use of their services
- To serve as a brokerage to administer community transportation services aimed at providing additional travel supports for all passengers with disabilities
- To conceptualize, develop and implement new (often untried and untested) transportation supports and services for residents of Peel with all types of disabilities
- To develop and improve the 'family of services' transportation model by maximizing use of available resources and developing and implementing new supports and services as required, based on community consultation and feedback

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- To assist persons with disabilities, their families and caregivers to identify appropriate transportation services and community resources, and work to develop strategies to help people with disabilities access and use these services to enhance their mobility in the community.

b) Status and Update on Programs and Services

Some over-arching applicant characteristics and challenges have been identified that appear to be common among all new programs, including:

- Unique family dynamics and cultural beliefs strongly influence “uptake” of new and “unfamiliar” services. Staff must continue promoting these new programs as well as continually support and encourage potential users and their families.
- Individuals with disabilities who wish to be considered as program applicants/service users are presenting with multiple or more complex needs than was anticipated prior to start-up of these new programs.
- A number of new applicants have been found to be ineligible for both TransHelp and the Passenger Assistant Program. Notwithstanding, they do have a disability that limits their ability to access transportation options and they do require accessible transportation. Staff must continue working with these groups to identify gaps in service and work with community partners to address these needs.

Two of the programs currently under the provision of the Accessible Transportation section are the Passenger Plus Program (Dialysis) and the Conventional Transit Access Program. These two programs, which are standard options under the ‘family of services’ model, are used routinely as referral options for clients seeking accessible transportation from the Region of Peel.

Several new accessible transportation options were initiated for residents of Peel in 2009 and early 2010. Pilots for the Passenger Assistant, Community Bus and Taxi Scrip have now ended and findings are presented in section two of this report.

i) Red Cross Dialysis Transportation Program (Passenger Plus Program)

To effectively meet the needs of dialysis-specific trips, in June 2003, Council approved funding to Red Cross for the purchase of a dedicated fleet of seven vehicles. These vehicles serve clients attending hospitals three times weekly for life-preserving dialysis care. An estimated 26,000 rides were targeted for delivery in 2009 however under 21,000 were actually delivered through the program. For 2010, the number of dialysis rides to be delivered is projected to be 22,000.

The decline in demand for ambulatory dialysis transportation delivered via the Red Cross can be attributed to several factors including advances in home dialysis treatment and the availability of new medications that slow down the process of renal disease. This decline in ambulatory dialysis rides and an increase in the cancellation rate for trips have meant budget deficits being realized by the Red Cross for delivery of this program.

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It should also be noted that as clients of the Red Cross dialysis program progress in age and their health deteriorates many are finding themselves using the door-to-door service offered by TransHelp as opposed to Red Cross which is a curb-to-curb program. In these instances they now qualify as an individual with a physical disability. An ever-growing portion of TransHelp trips continue to be allocated for dialysis treatment purposes.

Staff is also working with the Red Cross to determine whether any efficiency can be gained by combining current and wait-listed PAP passengers with dialysis transportation riders. If this test proves successful, it may affect the way dialysis transportation for ambulatory riders is provided in Peel.

ii) Conventional Transit Access Initiatives

This program provides a range of opportunities for people with disabilities to become more comfortable and familiar with accessible conventional transit systems. Accessible Transportation provides and pays for travel training assessments as well as up to five hours of individualized travel training for those who want to and can learn to use either Brampton or Mississauga transit.

Two thousand bus tickets were delivered to accessible transportation applicants and clients as part of the fare incentive initiative. A "how-to" video was created and is now available to first time transit riders with disabilities on DVD or via the internet, providing encouragement as well as tips on how to use conventional transit service. In 2009, twenty-six people received one-on-one travel training from the Orientation and Mobility Specialist who works under contract to Peel. As of December 2009, a total of 98 people with disabilities have been trained to use conventional public transit by accessing travel training through the Region of Peel.

Going forward, Accessible Transportation staff will be working with school boards in Peel to help create a common travel training program and referral materials for all schools. Students with special needs graduating in Peel will be equipped with the appropriate travel skills to allow them to independently get to work, school or to other social activities. For those students with disabilities unable to benefit from standardized travel training, efforts will be made to ensure that they know how to access and apply for other options.

Encouraging individuals with disabilities who can, to access and use conventional transit should remain a high priority for the Region of Peel as part of a long-term strategy. This will ensure specialized services such as TransHelp remain sustainable.

2. Findings from New Program Test Pilots

In 2009 Accessible Transportation initiated three pilot programs as part of the 'family of services' model. These programs were untried and untested in Peel. These programs sought to address gaps in accessible transportation options for Peel residents. For the most part, these programs have filled some gaps in Peel and some have proven to be more successful than others.

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a) Passenger Assistant Program

This program was created to provide supervised transportation to passengers with disabilities who cannot safely travel alone. The focus of this program was initially on the delivery of assisted transportation to adult day programs within the Region of Peel. The program is serving seniors, adults with intellectual disabilities, and those living with mental health disabilities.

The Passenger Assistant Program has been tested in various pilot capacities since June 2008. From June to December 2008, the program delivered 2,103 rides to residents of Brampton and Mississauga. Since then, additional vehicles have been added to the program for a total of nine serving Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga. In 2009 just fewer than 17,500 trips were delivered to Peel residents as part of the Passenger Assistant Program.

In the first quarter of 2010, a total of 86 trips per registered rider were delivered. The program currently has 104 registered users. An estimated 28,000 rides is being forecasted for delivery in 2010 as part of this program. As of the end of June 2010, all of the current vehicles designated for this program are being used to capacity and there is a waitlist of twenty-two eligible applicants.

The following chart shows the number of PAP trips delivered since the program began in June 2008:

Period	# of PAP Trips Delivered
June 2008 to December 2008 (<i>Pilot Phase 1</i>)	2,103
January 1 to December 31, 2009 (<i>Pilot Phase 2</i>)	17,500
January 1 to December 31, 2010	28,000 <i>*Projected</i>

Accessible Transportation staff conducted a survey in May 2010 of caregivers of clients who have been using the Passenger Assistant (PA) service for a year or longer. Overall, families have indicated that the Passenger Assistant Program has positively affected the lives of those who use it. Respondents reported that the service had significantly reduced stress on families, because it has provided caregiver relief in terms of the amount of driving caregivers are required to do. It was also noted that users have the opportunity to become a little more independent and to experience some autonomy from their immediate family or caregivers.

Families provided specific examples of times when either the Passenger Assistant or the driver (or both) went above and beyond the requirements of his her job to meet the needs of a passenger. Results from the client survey conducted in May 2010 can be found in Appendix I attached to this report.

b) Community Bus Demonstration Project

In October 2009 a Community Bus Demonstration Project was initiated by Accessible Transportation. This newly introduced service model had the capacity to provide rides using a flexible approach that was not possible within the structure of conventional public transit services at the time of program conception.

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The Community Bus program was designed to provide a semi-spontaneous ride alternative that had the potential to reduce demand on para-transit services. It was also hoped that the new program could promote enhanced community integration and could also play a role in reducing social isolation.

The objective of the community bus was to make regularly scheduled stops at multi-unit buildings with high concentrations of seniors and people with disabilities and take them to places of common interest such as shopping malls and community centres.

Initial interest of the service was positive and the following was observed:

- People who used the service, found it helpful and accessible
- People began to travel in small regular groups to places of interest
- A mix of people both with and without disabilities did access the service
- People expressed interest in and support for the service during the numerous public information sessions that were held to promote up-take of this service

After focused efforts by staff to promote the program and engage seniors and people with disabilities in using the bus, demand for the service has continued to decrease since it peaked in March 2010. Even at its peak, the community bus was only serving eight to ten riders a day. Considering the cost to operate this bus and the 31 person capacity, it is evident that the program, in its current form, is not sustainable.

It is also evident that Brampton Transit and Mississauga Transit are doing a great job of utilizing their accessible buses in areas where there are large concentrations of seniors. Although a need for this type of service existed a couple of years ago when it was first conceptualized, Accessible Transportation staff have concluded that it is now being met by conventional transit operators.

Prior to discontinuing the Community Bus Program in its current form, staff will engage the small group of users currently utilizing the service and assist them with finding alternate arrangements for their transportation needs.

Although, the semi-fixed route service provided by the large bus has not met the objectives of the Community Bus Program it has addressed an unanticipated gap in the community. Many community agencies who serve seniors and individuals with disabilities routinely hire TransHelp buses and drivers to deliver chartered transportation for special events and outings. This larger vehicle has meant that we have been able to address this community need with more capacity.

In addition, since the service is hired it has meant an additional revenue stream for the Region of Peel. It is therefore recommended that the large vehicle be kept in the Accessible Transportation fleet until its life cycle has been exhausted.

c) Taxi Scrip Program

The Taxi Scrip Pilot Program has proven to be a very popular option for seniors and people with disabilities. The objective of this type of program is to provide spontaneous transportation to low income passengers with disabilities in the Region.

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Accessible Transportation introduced the Taxi Scrip Program to the 'family of services' in December 2009. During the pilot phase from January 2010 to June 2010, sales of taxi scrip and registered clients have continued to increase each month.

Approximately 200 people have signed up and are currently registered for the pilot program. Sales of taxi scrip during the pilot phase reached approximately \$16,500. Since the scrip is partially subsidized by the Region of Peel, the total value of taxi scrip sold is \$26,000. It is difficult to determine the exact number of trips that have been delivered however utilizing an average taxi fare of \$10, this could potentially equate to 2,600 trips.

Taxi scrip programs have been described as one of the most cost effective ways to provide rides to people with disabilities and seniors, since the user pays a significant share of the cost of his/her ride. The taxi scrip program facilitates user spontaneity and encourages inclusion of private transportation resources into the system. New rides are generated as opposed to simply re-allocating recurring rides to a variety of resources.

Only two private taxi companies were used during the pilot phase of this program however the program is designed to be more effective when multiple vendors are used, creating more choice and availability for users. Staff proposes that the Region of Peel solicit the participation of other taxi industry members into the program with a focus on ensuring that the program is available for residents of Brampton, Caledon and Mississauga.

The chart below shows the results of the pilot from January 1, 2010 to June 30, 2010:

Taxi Scrip Pilot Results (Q1 and Q2 of 2010)			
Year 2010	New Clients Accepted	Taxi Scrip Books Sold	Approx. Trips Delivered
Quarter 1	90	250	1000
Quarter 2	110	400	1600
Total	200	650	2600

Anecdotal feedback from users of taxi scrip suggests the following:

- Taxicabs are appreciated by riders for their direct, exclusive ride
- Users want flexibility and the capacity to travel in large geographic areas. This service addresses this desire
- Same day service is possible as are open (will-call) return rides
- 24/7 service, 365 days a year
- Door-to-door service is preserved making access easier for users with disabilities than is often the case when they attempt to try other forms of accessible transportation

3. Going Forward

Accessible Transportation staff will continue to look at ways to make best use of the range of transportation resources that are now available as a result of the merger that took place between the former Accessible Transportation Coordination Office and TransHelp.

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a) Passenger Assistant Program

There is still interest in exploring variations of the Passenger Assistant program model. There is an identified group of TransHelp users who could definitely benefit from this service. There may be an opportunity to provide the service to a selected blend of passengers including current program users, some dialysis riders and some TransHelp users.

Staff is beginning to consult with other organizations (serving people with cognitive or intellectual disabilities) such as Peel Halton Acquired Brain Injury Services (PHABIS) to determine how to best serve the unique and different needs of their clientele using the Passenger Assistant Program model. In addition, a group of TransHelp users have also been identified as being possible candidates for a PAP type service. Until now, the PAP program has only focused on ambulatory individuals with disabilities. Staff will be investigating options for offering a modified PAP type program for TransHelp users in need of such service.

The Passenger Assistant Program is currently delivered by The Canadian Red Cross and Caledon Community Services under contractual agreements with the Region of Peel. Staff will be evaluating these externally delivered services to ensure that they remain cost effective and are being delivered using the most appropriate method.

b) Community Bus

The Community Bus Program in its current form is not sustainable. It is recommended that the Region of Peel suspend the program and focus efforts on addressing areas where needs and gaps exist. There is some potential to use smaller type vehicles to serve seniors and group homes with certain social outings such as shopping. TransHelp has operated 'shopping charter' routes for many years and these specialized runs have proven to be very successful and popular among seniors. Staff should continue to look at these options as part of Accessible Transportation's long term service delivery strategy.

The 31-passenger bus purchased by the Region of Peel for the Community Bus program has great potential to serve an unmet need among community agencies serving seniors and individuals with disabilities. Quite often, these agencies seek TransHelp support for large events and gatherings where a need to transport large groups of seniors and people with disabilities exist. Since this type of service is often hired, Accessible Transportation has an opportunity to increase revenues and ease pressure on operating costs for the section.

It is also recommended that staff be authorized to investigate retrofit options for the large bus in order to increase the number of available wheelchair spaces on the bus. Currently the 31 passenger bus has only three wheelchair spaces. If the number of wheelchair spaces is increased to five or six, the bus could support larger groups of people with disabilities. In addition the large bus could also be used by the Region of Peel to support the community in emergency evacuation scenarios.

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c) Taxi Scrip

Since the taxi scrip program has been met with success and is increasingly becoming a popular transportation option for seniors and people with disabilities, it is suggested that the program be implemented as a standard option within the 'family of services' model in Peel Region. Since sixty percent of the taxi scrip cost is absorbed by the user, it is a cost effective method of delivering accessible transportation. In addition, the program should be made available to other taxi companies to participate. This means more choice and options for clients including those living in Caledon.

A strong focus will continue to be placed on taxi scrip as a spontaneous, flexible and cost effective way for small groups of people to travel. Staff will be looking for ways to make it easier for new users to have their photo ID created and to avoid having to find their way to the TransHelp office. This will be a very significant program improvement particularly for those who are interested in taxi scrip but who are not TransHelp riders.

d) Costing Analysis of External Providers

With the ever growing demand for accessible transportation services due to changes in legislation and demographics it is critical that the Region of Peel continue to look at the most cost effective method of delivering services. There are advantages and disadvantages to both internally and externally delivered services. Since the STPD study in 2004, a number of services and programs are currently being delivered via external providers. Staff is planning to conduct a costing analysis of these services to ensure that the most cost effective method of service delivery is still being realized.

e) Engaging the Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN)

The Region of Peel should continue to discuss community transportation needs with the appropriate LHIN agencies since an increasing portion of the transportation services provided by Accessible Transportation support seniors and provide trips for dialysis and other medical appointments. An opportunity to tap into some of the funding available through the LHIN agencies may exist. As a result, this would alleviate some of the pressure on the tax-funded operating costs of Accessible Transportation.

f) Strengthening Partnerships with Conventional Services

Delivering a 'family of services' model of accessible transportation services in Peel Region will require forging new partnerships and enhancing existing ones. Many of the Region's conventional service providers have made huge strides in ensuring their fleet is fully accessible for people with disabilities. Staff is planning to work with Brampton and Mississauga Transit to look at ways of encouraging further use of accessible conventional services. One way of doing so is to design and implement incentive programs for users of TransHelp and other specialized services. The transit operators in Peel could potentially develop a shared-cost initiative to achieve this objective.

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FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Funding for the Passenger Assistant and Taxi Scrip Program is approved in the current budget under Cost Centre CE60106 and Account 23800. The retrofitting of the Community Bus vehicle will be funded from Federal Gas Tax funds under proposed capital project # 11-0249, if approved.



per Dan Labrecque
Commissioner of Public Works

Approved for Submission:



D. Szwarc, Chief Administrative Officer

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APPENDIX I

Passenger Assistant Program Client Survey

In May 2010 attempts were made to administer a client satisfaction survey to fifty families/caregivers/clients that had been using the Passenger Assistant transportation service for a year or longer. To improve the typical response rate, the survey was administered by Accessible Transportation staff via telephone. A total of 36 respondents completed the survey. This represents a 72% response rate.

The following are the responses received to the survey questions:

(1) Before the Passenger Assistant Program began, how did you (or your loved one) most often get to his/her destination(s)?	
47%	family drove (parents, grandparents, brothers or sisters, or significant other)
19%	private driver/private company/taxi
19%	driven by staff/support workers
3%	public transit/walking
3%	other para-transit service
9%	no transportation (couldn't attend programs so stayed home)

(2) What is the best part of the PA program for you or your loved one?	
58%	that program actually exists is the best part
28%	convenience; it gives family relief from driving
14%	independence the program provides to clients

(3) What parts of the program could be changed or improved?	
6%	add evening/weekend service
22%	more consistent ride times
6%	lower fares/fully subsidized ride
19%	changes should be made to the no-show ride policy/cancellation policy/holiday policy
44%	nothing at the moment could be changed or improved
3%	other

(4) Are vehicles clean and well maintained?	
100%	Yes

(5) Are drivers courteous to the riders?	
100%	Yes

(6) Do you (or your loved one) feel safe when riding PAP buses?	
100%	Yes

(7) Is the ride comfortable?	
100%	Yes

(8) Do the drivers make efforts to help you (or your loved one) with specific needs?	
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81%	Yes
19%	No Comment

(9) Are the Passenger Assistants courteous to riders?	
97%	Yes
3%	No Comment

(10) Do the Passenger Assistants make efforts to help you (or your loved one) with specific needs?	
94%	Yes
6%	No Comment

(11) Do you (or your loved one) arrive at your program at a reasonable time?	
94%	Yes
6%	Gets to program too early and comes home too late

(12) Have you (or your loved one) ever had to make a complaint about the Passenger Assistant program?	
86%	No, never, absolutely not
14%	Yes, however all were satisfied with outcome

(13) How did you find out about the PAP program?	
69%	Community agency, work program or day program
17%	Peel Region (focus group, TransHelp referral)
14%	Other

Additional Comments from Survey Respondents

"I hope you guys never give up on me. We need all the help we can get. Moneywise as well"

"Continue doing what you're doing"

"Very very happy with the program because they come on time, they call always and are so polite"

"24 hr cancellation notice is not fair" - should be able to cancel up until the last minute

"Excellent service! Thank you very much. Very appreciated, very kind and Joelson is always excited for the bus ride"

"Thank you and we love the program. The fact that they won't drop her off without anyone but her parents is a really important thing and family thinks that's wonderful."

"Thanks the Red Cross and Peel for accepting her on the bus."